



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

of those who have discussed it. Elsewhere it has been tried with favor and success, and it is desirable that it should have a fair trial here.

- ART. VII. — 1. *The Poetical Works of HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.* Revised Edition. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1866. 4 vols. 16mo.
2. *The Prose Works of HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.* Revised Edition. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1866. 3 vols. 16mo.

THE publication of a complete and uniform edition of Mr. Longfellow's Works is an event which suggests to us not so much question as acknowledgment of his excellence, and we have here rather to celebrate a fame already assured than to enter upon a critical analysis of his poetry. It is yet too soon to measure the whole obligation of American letters to him, and it seems somewhat late to reason minutely of the fact of his genius. We doubt if criticism be the hazel wand that points to the hidden sources of the living springs; but even if it were so, we should think it rather idle to flourish it with an air of divination over clearness and sweetness that long ago sparkled into the sun. It is not necessary to dwell upon Mr. Longfellow's delicate and beautiful feeling,

“As pure as water and as good as bread,”

or his exquisite intellectual refinement, which has troubled shallowness before now with doubts of his original power. Nor is it possible for our time to determine accurately the greatness of this original power, or to separate it from the manifold acquirements interwoven with it. Enough that the whole is admirable, and that the quickening faculty is unmistakable.

There is something, indeed, in all the aspects of these familiar poems that appeals to us in proof of the purely creative and poetical nature of Mr. Longfellow's mind. It is very noticeable how large is the proportion of his dramatic and narrative pieces, and how, when obeying his own instincts, he seems

always to have chosen the literary form faithfulest to life, which is primarily a story and not a sermon or a lecture. Consciousness of the truth that only the art which recounts can fully and lastingly interest all men, is dominant in him; yet he is not entirely free from the lingering superstition, come down to us from the artistic depravity of the last century, that poetry can teach by appealing to the logical faculties instead of the imagination. So, while his longer poems are all sustained by the recital or exhibition of events, and by far the greater number of his shorter pieces have something of drama or narrative in them, and of course point their own moral, he has himself sometimes "moralized his song," and given us didactic verses, which have among his other poems about the same relative value that his occasional criticisms have among his travel-sketches and prose romances. Mr. Longfellow has unerring perceptions as regards his own work, but he has not the exegetic nor the critical temperament. It is the creative habit of his mind not to consider things as in themselves beautiful or ugly, but rather as elements from which a beautiful effect may or may not be produced. Wherever he has to assemble, and narrate, or present, he is charming, and master of his reader. When he has to declare or to decide, he betrays the poet's strangeness to the office of the preacher and the critic, and fails of his wonted effect.

We do not mean, then, great praise of the didactic poems of Mr. Longfellow when we say that they please us better than most other poems of the kind: for of all that he has written, they alone seem to us wanting in original thought. They have, however, such a characteristic manner and music, that they have always enjoyed a very undue share of association with his name. As a poet's poorest is easiest to be copied, Mr. Longfellow's didactic vein has been wrought by imitation and repetition till its original product has been made tedious to many, and question of the value of all his work has been mooted by critics in the country where Mr. Swinburne has become great. The fatality is not a strange one;

"All can raise the flowers now,
For all have got the seed";

"And now again the people
Call it but a weed," —

laments another master of our time, whom this fatality has befallen. Yet it is only an annual flower that ripens seeds for thieves to steal, and, as we have hinted, not the gardener's best. There is little danger that perennials like the "Evangeline" and "The Golden Legend" shall be generally cheapened by reproduction, or that "Hyperion" and "Kavanagh" shall cease to be sole in their beauty.

Of these, and of all the principal works of Mr. Longfellow, it is remarkable how they continue to hold the first place in the kinds of literature to which they belong. The "Hiawatha," indeed, is unique, whatever its absolute merit may be, or its worth as compared with that of the other poems of its author, or of contemporary poets. For ourselves, we are inclined to rate it high, because of its courage and truth. It is not a copy of Indian life, but it is better than a copy, for in dealing with the life of an untamable race in the light of its own wild beauty of legend and custom, the poet works in a spirit of the highest fidelity to art. He does not portray savage squalor and brutality and vileness, as Greek art would not reproduce the ugliness that was unquestionably commoner than beauty among Greek men and women. The result is a reproduction of Indian life, none the less typical because idealized, and infinitely better than all other pictures of it. The "Hiawatha" leaves the Indians to the reason as it found them, savages; but it restores them to the fancy, and it annihilates at once the conventional Red-man of the novelists, and the Varmint of the borderers, rehabilitating the shadowy past of our primeval wilderness with a poetic, simple, natural, sylvan life.

In like manner "The Courtship of Miles Standish" restores an image of Puritan days, less austere and gloomy than those Hawthorne has given, but not less fascinating, and not, we believe, less faithful; while it is again in its conception a poem as original as the "Hiawatha" or the "Evangeline." This last, which we think the best of all Mr. Longfellow's poems, if not the best poem of our age, is to be prized for many different reasons that will suggest themselves to the reader, but for none more, it seems to us, than for its creative gift of living human interest to unstoried places. The beings of the poet's fancy, who are akin to us in faith, in time, and capacity of suf-

fering and enjoyment, traverse vast silent spaces of continent with scarce a memory of our race, and leave them articulate and full of association. It is not much that everywhere in French Canada the traveller should look to see Évangeline, and Gabriel Lajeunesse, and Basil the Blacksmith, and Father Felician, in the quaint towns of dormer-windowed cottages and among the picturesque peasants in the fields; but it is much that, wherever he goes upon the great rivers of the West, his reveries should be full of them only, and that the poem should chant its music in his ear, till it breathes away all the present, and makes him contemporary and companion of the exiles who rowed their cumbrous boat

“far down the Beautiful River,
Past the Ohio shore, and past the mouth of the Wabash,
Into the golden stream of the broad and swift Mississippi.”

It is much that one poem should have so peopled these scenes that the mind seeks there no other presences than those it suggests.

“Kavanagh,” in dealing with the New England village-life of our own time, or of the transitional period that passed with the introduction of railways, is also very successful. Indeed, it seems to us as yet quite unapproached, by the multitude of New England romances that have followed it, in a certain delicate truthfulness, as it is likely to remain unsurpassed in its light humor and pensive grace. In “Kavanagh,” and in the poems mentioned, as well as many shorter poems, Mr. Longfellow has responded to a very natural and evident longing of the popular heart for something like recognition of the national place and home in literature, while at other times he has been true to as genuine an impulse of our complex Americanism, where he has dealt with the beautiful remote from us in everything but sympathy.

The whole English-speaking world, and great part of Continental Europe, have naturalized and translated his poetry; yet we feel so deeply his intense nationality that we find it hard to consider his work except as related to our growth in the best forms of civilization. Although our poetic literature did not actually begin with him, he is nevertheless to be accounted first among those who enlarged and enriched it,

and lifted it from a conceited provincialism into a generous universality. He had faith from the beginning in the native sense of beauty which underlies all our busy, shrewd, hard civilization, and which makes us as a people at this moment the foremost in the world in appreciation of letters which appeal to the sentiment and the imagination. He in greater degree than any other has discerned that our separation from the past affords vantage-ground on which we may enjoy it undisturbed; that we are indeed its absolute heirs, with a possession untroubled by the mortmains that sadden and confuse the modern life of Europe. From a consciousness of this kind came "The Golden Legend," where the old picturesque, superstitious, mystical, devoted spirit of mediæval days breathes again in an atmosphere which it never darkened, and in which the corporeal decay of dead errors and obsolete good has not left a taint of pestilence. Above all, in this sentiment is written the lovely romance of "Hyperion," — a book which it is hard to mention without some expression of delight in its style. Its prose, vibrant, harmonious, sustained, has not too often a rhythmic character, though it is the prose of a poet, and is full of poetic imagery and that kind of metaphor which flows naturally into verse. It has sometimes the movement of imaginative German prose; yet it is always pure English. At other times, for unclinging sweetness of tone it deserves to match with the Italian of Boccaccio, while its numerous briefer periods give it a variety which the work of the elder master has not. After the first perusal of the book the reader is so taken with its music, that to open it at any place is to yield to a delicious fascination. There is in the perfect adaptation of the style to the subject a felicity equal to that which associates a poetic thought with its appropriate measure: there is nothing to be forgiven, there is everything to be enjoyed. But it is another value of the book which we wish to note here in the fact that, while none of its scenes are laid in America, its inspiration and its chief person are wholly and immutably American. The romance is colored and perfumed through and through with the literature and life of Europe, yet it comes from the heart of Americanism, and none but Americans can appreciate its sentiment thoroughly; for

in Paul Flemming is embodied the affection for the historic and the traditional which is the genuine fruit of our soil, and which contrasts so vividly with the indifference of Europeans themselves to such things. "It often astonishes me," says the Baron to Flemming, "that, coming from that green world of yours beyond the sea, you should feel so much interest in these old things, — nay, at times seem so to have drunk in their spirit as really to live in the times of old. For my part, I do not see what charm there is in the pale and wrinkled countenance of the past, so to entice the soul of a young man." The puzzled Baron speaks for the polite Europe of every traveler's acquaintance. In another place our author had already spoken for the America thus addressed: "I, too, have been a pilgrim of Outre-Mer, for to my youthful imagination the Old World was a kind of Holy Land"; — in which sense all Americans are pilgrims of Outre-Mer as certainly as they are generous and refined.

There was early a revolt in Mr. Longfellow's mind against the theory once cherished, of a native literature corresponding to American geography and natural history; and he was one of the first to ridicule conceptions that have since become the laughing-stock of criticism. This poet, so essentially of our time and country, and with so great innate power, has always felt that beauty, from whatever source it came, was as little to be shut out of our hearts as the races of men seeking homes and citizenship among us were to be refused by our polity; and he has delighted us with charms won from the poets of all times and countries, though chiefly from those he seems to have loved most, — the German romantic poets. With these, indeed, he had a natural affinity, the reason for which appears to the student in the fact that modern German romance was largely English in its inspiration. The poets of this school wrought in the ways that have amplified all modern literatures. The springs of Italian song, from which the wells of our English were so long and often filled, from Chaucer's time to Milton's, had been enriched by their course through Greek and Latin soil, and the Germans, in their turn, drank from what was best in English letters. But Mr. Longfellow, in drawing so deeply as he has done from German romance, has not only brought us back some-

thing of our own again, but has also introduced new elements with it. Some delicate graces of peculiarly German poetry are through his influence as much at home among us as the Christmas-tree, and their popularity has greatly helped us toward the knowledge that in vague suggestion and subtle sentiment is a charm that wins the heart of downrightness and reality. A great poet educates his nation by developing its original capacities for intellectual pleasure; and Mr. Longfellow's success in imbuing Americans with a feeling for unfamiliar effects in literary art, contemporaneous with much laborious failure on the part of others to accustom our taste to those peculiarities of the German mind which they have admired, is proof of his finer perception and wiser judgment. We remain almost wholly unaffected by efforts to infuse a liking for any characteristics of German literature except those which Mr. Longfellow has brought us from the poets.

Somewhat curiously contrasting with the earnest and often pensive cast of our author's best work, and the unpalliated moralization of his poorest, is a quality we note in him, and find very rare among later writers of the English tongue,—whom, indeed, he resembles little in any way. This is a certain beautiful gayety, which is to humor somewhat as the bouquet is to the body of wine. It is an effect that seems to have its spring rather in the poet's heart than brain, and it pleases through mere will of pleasing. It is the breath of the airiest talk, a grace of the social Continental life, the last and least definable charm of perfect culture and maturity. It appears among the poems chiefly in "The Golden Legend," where it seems to be the poet's own nature playing irrepressibly through the story, and in the Interludes of "The Wayside Inn," where he speaks familiarly with the reader. We find it in "Kavanagh," though that is on the whole a pensive book, and sometimes also in "Hyperion." But this mature grace struck us most of all in the author's first book, "Outre-Mer."

It is only one of many flavors of ripeness in his earlier productions. Indeed, it appears to us that his art never betrays the crudeness or imperfection of essay. It was excellent in the beginning, and its last exercise is singularly like its first.

He has had from the beginning but one manner. In his latest books we are aware of the same magic that charmed us of yore, and we discern that this *goldene Zeit die nicht rostet* is not an *ewige Jugend* only when we contrast such poems as "The Bridge" and "The Bridge of Cloud," which have all the pathetic difference of youth and age in their likeness. The poet keeps throughout the grace and subtile power of the past; he keeps all that was ever his own, even to the love of profuse simile, and the quaint doubt of his reader implied by the elaborated meaning; and he loses only the tints and flavors not thoroughly assimilated or not native in him. Throughout is the same habit of recondite and scholarly allusion, the same quick sympathy with the beautiful in simple and common things, the same universality, the same tenderness for country and for home. Over all presides individuality superior to accidents of resemblance, and distinguishing each poem with traits unmistakably and only the author's; and the equality in the long procession of his beautiful thoughts never wearies, but is like that of some fine bass-relief, in which the varying allegory reveals one manner and many inspirations.

Together with this peculiar artistic equality in the poems of Mr. Longfellow is a spiritual maturity, which the reader cannot fail to notice. As there never has been anything unripe or decrepit in this master's art, so there never has been anything crude or faltering in his devotion to greatness and purity in life. His work is not the record of a career beginning in generous and impossible dreams, and ending in sordid doubt and pitiful despire; nor the history of a soul born to spiritual poverty, and working at last into tardy hopes and sympathies which scarcely suffice to discharge the errors of the past. These books tell of a soul clothed at once in humane affections and divine aspirations, of a poetic nature filled with conscious and instinctive reverence for the supreme office of poetry in the world. They form, indeed, so perfect a biography of the author, that, if one knew nothing of his literary life, here one might read more than could otherwise be told of its usefulness and beauty. Here is the story of blithe acquaintance with Latin lands and literature, and the exultation of a young man's heart and brain in their ancient scenes and ever-youthful songs; here

is hinted, in a strain graver, but not less sweet, and even more enthusiastic, friendship with German romance, old and new, life in the home of sentiment, and growth in learning as graceful and easy as it is wide ; here is the half-pensive serenity of the studious poet as he turns the key upon his books, and saunters forth into the green by-ways and elmy streets of the New England life about his gates. This poet is the traveller of the wide realm of thought, the world of imagination ; he has touched at all the sunny Mediterranean and Adriatic ports ; all the French and Spanish coasts are known to him ; he brings wealth from the frozen Scandinavian lands as rare as the ivory set in the beryl of the immemorial icebergs ; he gathers flotsam from the bays and inlets, the lakes and rivers of home. Full of the world, he transmutes his large experience and far-brought learning into the poems we know, with a secure and patient art that malice or envy never could mar, and that has never acknowledged enmity with any man. Indeed, the silence of all these books concerning things that usually embitter poet's lives is not their least significant comment upon the author's wisdom and good-heartedness. His growing fame did not fail to create him foes ; but if few poets have been more repeatedly assailed than he, none has been so willing to leave his defence entirely to time.

It is, of course, not the poet's merely literary life that is recorded in his books. He who touches the hearts of others must write from his own, and doubtless the songs of a true poet preserve the memory, not only of all the events, but of all the moods of his life. They must needs commemorate his sacreddest and inmost experiences, — his joy and his sorrow, his loss and his gain, the love dear and the death sore to him, — and thus again form his truest biography. But the hospitality that invites the whole world home is exquisitely proud and shy, and its house is built like those old palaces in which a secret gallery was made for the musicians, and gay or plaintive music from an invisible source delighted the banqueting guests. The poet's courteous guests will be decently content with their pleasure, and may not seek to know the hidden impulse of his songs. We could not, indeed, inquire too curiously without self-betrayal ; for if this poet's songs are the history of his

inner life, are they not equally history of the lives of us who have grown to be men and women since he began to sing?

It is certainly one of the great privileges of a beloved poet to have his thoughts so interwoven with his readers' days, that, looking back, they seem not so much to have read his work as to have lived it, and that they largely recall themselves, remembering what and where they were, and how they fared when they first read such and such a poem of his. Perhaps it will be one of the compensations of the future which the poet shall inherit, that those whom he has delighted shall pay him, in language purged alike of flattery and of shame, the homage of their entire gratitude. There is an inadequate longing in every one who approaches a poet's presence to declare something of this obligation, and to confide a sense of identified sympathies. But the occasion tricks poet and admirer alike, and slips away, and nothing has been said. The confidence too sacred to be shared with a third, which was to have celebrated the intimacy established in many years of silent communion, is destined not to be uttered; and each reader must be content to express only that which may be spoken without awkwardness in the acclaim of a common voice.

As we submit ourselves to some such condition here, we are sensible how small part all that we have written is of the tribute due the master whose greatness has tended to the goodness and happiness of men in so potent and fine a degree that he has not only made the world wiser and pleasanter, but has not added a word's weight to the bitterness and evil of any soul in it.